

Talking Points for Questions on “Opting Out”

The following are talking points school administrators can use if they get questions about “opting out” of statewide assessments.

The state has no policy allowing for students to opt out of standardized tests in Idaho. For more than a decade, Idaho has had core standards in place and has measured students against these standards, and the state has never had an opt-out policy. If students are attending public schools, they will take the statewide standardized test so the state can measure a student’s achievement and a school’s performance each year.

If parents have concerns about the curriculum being taught in a particular school, those decisions are made at the local level. We encourage parents to work with the local school board in selecting which curriculum is adopted.

Measurement is a critical part of any industry. In education, assessments – whether administered at the state, district, or classroom level – are used to determine how students are performing and whether or not they are reaching the goals the state has set for them. In addition, we as a state and districts at a local level must be held accountable for every taxpayer dollar that is spent and the results each program is getting. The only way we can evaluate these results is by measuring student achievement in a fair and consistent way every year. The state’s standardized test is just one measurement, but it is a critical measurement that teachers, parents and policymakers can use to see how students and schools are performing. While standardized tests should not be the only measure used to determine a student’s achievement, a school’s performance, or a teacher’s performance, it is a key indicator and should be included in the overall evaluation.

(A sample letter to send to parents is included [below](#).)

Schools are responsible for making sure they meet 95% participation, even during the Field Test. It is critical that we as a state know how all Idaho students are performing academically, not just some.

When it comes to the Field Test, neither the state nor local school districts will be receiving scoring information, but we will be receiving lots of other valuable information prior to the first operational test:

- Evaluation of test questions and whether similar questions should be used going forward
- Students get to experience this new type of test before they take it in Spring 2015
- Teachers get to experience this new type of test, how long it will take and what it will be like before Spring 2015.
- School administrators, IT directors, test coordinators, etc. have a year to practice administering this test to all students prior to the first full administration for accountability purposes.
- These are just some of the benefits. I’m sure you can think of many others!

Because schools are required to meet the 95% participation this year and each year going forward, we encourage schools to be proactive in communicating with parents about the standards and the new test, what it is and what their students will experience. Many parents are not familiar with how this test differs from the ISAT, so we encourage schools to bring parents in and explain to them the benefits of the new test prior to the Field Test this spring.

Here are a few ways you might be able to accomplish that:

- Host a Family Math Night or Family Reading Night and run through Practice Test questions with students and parents at the same time as one of your activities.
- Send a letter and sample test questions home with students and ask them to try solving these problems with their parents. Post the answers on your district website where more information about the standards and new assessment is available.
- Be sure every teacher has information and talking points on the new test prepared for parent-teacher conferences. Talk about what each student did this year so far and also talk about what is happening going forward.
- Host small discussion groups with 7-10 parents at a time to go over their questions about the standards and new assessment.
- Record a teacher at your school or district describing why he or she prefers the new test over the ISAT.

(A sample letter you can use in responding to parents is included [below](#).)

DATE

XXX

XXX

XXX

Dear XXX,

I received your request dated February 20th to opt out of the Smarter Balanced Assessments for your students XXX at XXX. Unfortunately, our school district is not able to honor this request.

According to a ruling from the Idaho Attorney General's office, instruction and assessment of the Idaho Core is covered in the State of Idaho's "rules of thoroughness." With that determination, all public school students are expected to receive consistent instruction according to the prescribed standards and take the associated assessment – in this case the Smarter Balanced Assessment. Please find a copy of this determination on the Idaho State Department of Education's website at this address: <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/commonAssessment/>. Therefore, the only way that a parent/guardian could opt out of the assessment would be to home school their child or place them in a private school/parochial school as all public schools require the standards be taught and measured using a year-end summative assessment.

If you have further questions, I will be glad to be your point of contact.

Sincerely,

NAME

TITLE

Cc: Mrs. XXX, Principal, XXX School